

March 3, 2026
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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB935 – FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS
**Correctional Services - Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services-
Female Incarcerated Individuals**

TO: Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Carol Stern

My name is Carol Stern, I live in District 16, in Chevy Chase and I am submitting testimony as a member of the Maryland Leadership Council of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ) in support of the implementation of the legally required community-based women's prerelease unit. JUFJ is a member of the Women's Prerelease Equity Coalition and organizes more than 6,000 Jewish Marylanders and allies in support of local and state campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice inspired by Jewish values.

The Jewish text that shapes my religious and moral conviction that the legislature must build and fully fund the Women's Prerelease Facility is from Genesis Chapter 1, where we learn that humans are created in God's image - *B'tselem Elohim*. We all contain the divine spark, and we all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. This applies to all people, whether they have been incarcerated or not. When we are working to reform our criminal legal system, we must demand that it operates in accordance with these deeply held Jewish beliefs.

Despite the fact that in 2021, the Maryland General Assembly overrode the Governor Hogan's veto to pass, on a bipartisan basis, the Gender-Responsive Pre-Release Act, which required the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to:

- Open and operate a pre-release center for women;
- Do so in or adjacent to the zip code where most released women will be returning; and
- Provide educational, occupational, parenting/family reunification, and therapeutic and substance use programming that is gender-responsive, trauma-informed, and evidence-based.

Little progress has been made toward establishing the community-based standalone prerelease facility that this law mandates and incarcerated women continue to be denied adequate services at a location that will ensure their successful return to their communities.

Prerelease programs help people nearing the end of their prison sentences secure employment, housing, drug treatment and mental health services, and family support. There are multiple such

facilities for men in Maryland, but none for women. Women have very different reentry issues than men. Women need reentry support for the sake of their families, since most incarcerated women were primary caretakers of children before their incarceration, and many mothers in state prisons are single parents. Maryland has the opportunity to be a leader in providing effective prerelease services and opportunities to incarcerated women by passing HB 935 to fulfill the promise of the 2021 law.

Jews United for Justice urges this Committee to hold fast to the Maryland General Assembly's earlier commitment to ensure equitable women's pre-release services and facilities, and to report favorably on HB 935 with the amendments outlined in the Women's Prerelease Equity Coalition testimony filed today. This facility needs to be built, it needs to be built now, and it needs to be built right.